

# Renaissance Architecture and More Artists

THE RENAISSANCE

**ARCHITECTURE IN THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE.** Informed by the same principles of harmonious geometry that underlay painting and sculpture, architecture recovered the magnificence of ancient Rome. The most noted Renaissance architects were Alberti, Brunelleschi, Bramante, and Palladio.

A writer, painter, sculptor, and architect, Alberti (pronounced al BEAR tee; 1404–72) was the Renaissance's major theorist who wrote treatises on painting, sculpture, and architecture. He downplayed art's religious purpose and urged artists to study "sciences" like history, poetry, and mathematics as building blocks. Alberti wrote the first systematic guide to perspective and provided sculptors with rules for ideal human proportions.

Another multifaceted Renaissance man, Brunelleschi (pronounced brew nell LESS kee; 1377–1446) was skilled as a goldsmith, sculptor, mathematician, clock builder, and architect. But he is best known as the father of modern engineering. Not only did he discover mathematical perspective, he also championed the central-plan church design that replaced the medieval basilica. He alone was capable of constructing a dome for the Florence Cathedral, called the Eighth Wonder of the World.

His inspiration was to build two shells, each supporting the other, crowned by a lantern stabilizing the whole. In designing the Pazzi Chapel, Brunelleschi used Classical motifs as surface decoration. His design illustrates the revival of Roman forms and Renaissance emphasis on symmetry and regularity.

In 1502, Bramante (pronounced brah MAHN tee; 1444–1514) built the Tempietto ("Little Temple") in Rome on the site where St. Peter was crucified. Although tiny, it was the perfect prototype of the domed central plan church. It expressed the Renaissance ideals of order, simplicity, and harmonious proportions.

Known for his villas and palaces, Palladio (pronounced pah LAH dee oh; 1508–90) was enormously influential in later centuries through his treatise, *Four Books on Architecture*. Neoclassical revivalists like Thomas Jefferson and Christopher Wren, architect of St. Paul's in London, used Palladio's rule book as a guide. The Villa Rotonda incorporated Greek and Roman details like porticos with Ionic columns, a flattened dome like the Pantheon, and rooms arranged symmetrically around a central rotunda.

## THE FOUR R'S OF RENAISSANCE ARCHITECTURE

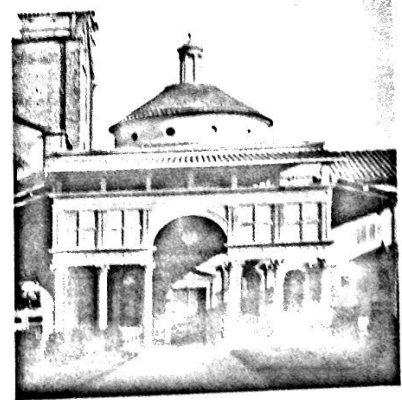
The four R's of Renaissance architecture are Rome, Rules, Reason, and 'Rithmetic.

**ROME** In keeping with their passion for the classics, Renaissance architects systematically measured Roman ruins to copy their style and proportion. They revived elements like the rounded arch, concrete construction, domed rotunda, portico, barrel vault, and column.

**RULES** Since architects considered themselves scholars rather than mere builders, they based their work on theories, as expressed in various treatises. Alberti formulated aesthetic rules that were widely followed.

**REASON** Theories emphasized architecture's rational basis, grounded in science, math, and engineering. Cool reason replaced the mystical approach of the Middle Ages.

**'RITHMETIC** Architects depended on arithmetic to produce beauty and harmony. A system of ideal proportions related parts of a building to each other in numerical ratios, such as the 2:1 ratio of a nave twice as high as the width of a church. Layouts relied on geometric shapes, especially the circle and square.



Brunelleschi, Pazzi Chapel, 1440–61, Florence.



Bramante, Tempietto, 1444–1514, Rome.



Palladio, Villa Rotonda, begun 1550, Vicenza.

**3. THE USE OF LIGHT AND SHADOW.** Chiaroscuro (pronounced key arrow SKEWR o), which means “light/dark” in Italian, referred to the new technique for modeling forms in painting by which lighter parts seemed to emerge from darker areas, producing the illusion of rounded, sculptural relief on a flat surface.

**4. PYRAMID CONFIGURATION.** Rigid profile portraits and grouping of figures on a horizontal grid in the picture's foreground gave way to a more three-dimensional “pyramid configuration.” This symmetrical composition builds to a climax at the center, as in Leonardo's “Mona Lisa,” where the focal point is the figure's head.

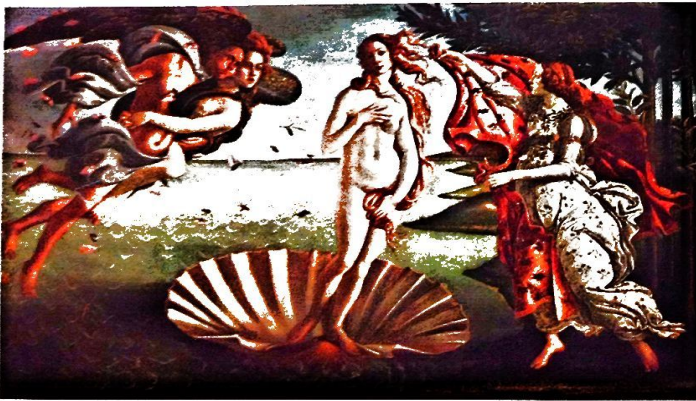
### THE EARLY RENAISSANCE: THE FIRST THREE HALL-OF-FAMERS

The Renaissance was born in Florence. The triumvirate of quattrocento (15th-century) geniuses who invented this new style included the painter Masaccio and sculptor Donatello, who reintroduced naturalism to art, and the painter Botticelli, whose elegant linear figures reached a height of refinement.

**MASACCIO.** The founder of Early Renaissance painting, which became the cornerstone of European painting for more than six centuries, was Masaccio (pronounced ma SAHT chee oh; 1401–28). Nicknamed “Sloppy Tom” because he neglected his appearance in his pursuit of art, Masaccio was the first since Giotto to paint the human figure not as a linear column, in the Gothic style, but as a real human being. As a Renaissance painter, Vasari said, “Masaccio made his figures stand upon their feet.” Other Masaccio innovations were a mastery of perspective and his use of a single, constant source of light casting accurate shadows.

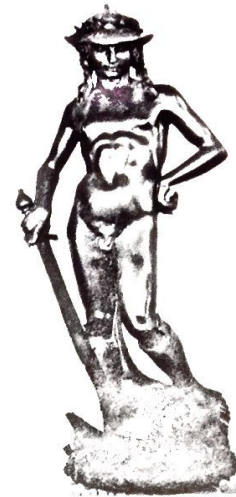
**DONATELLO.** What Masaccio did for painting, Donatello (1386–1466) did for sculpture. His work recaptured the central discovery of Classical sculpture: contrapposto, or weight concentrated on one leg with the rest of the body relaxed, often turned. Donatello carved figures and draped them realistically with a sense of their underlying skeletal structure.

His “David” was the first life-size, freestanding nude sculpture since the Classical period. The brutal naturalism of “Mary Magdalen” was even more probing, harshly accurate, and “real” than ancient Roman portraits. He carved the aged Magdalen as a gaunt, shriveled hag, with stringy hair and hollowed eyes. Donatello's sculpture was so lifelike, the artist was said to have shouted at it, “Speak, speak, or the plague take you!”



**BOTTICELLI.** While Donatello and Masaccio laid the groundwork for three-dimensional realism, Botticelli (pronounced bought tee CHEL lee; 1444–1510) was moving in the opposite direction. His decorative linear style and tiptoeing, golden-haired maidens were more a throw-back to Byzantine art. Yet his nudes epitomized the Renaissance. “Birth of Venus” marks the rebirth of Classical mythology.

**Botticelli, “Birth of Venus,”** 1482, Uffizi, Florence. Botticelli drew undulating lines and figures with long necks, sloping shoulders, and pale, soft bodies.



**Donatello, “David,”** c. 1430–32, Museo Nazionale, Florence. Donatello pioneered the Renaissance style of sculpture with rounded body masses.